"The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," recto of an Apocalypse manuscript (Wikimedia Commons/British Library)

by Thomas Gumbleton

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Before I begin reflection on the Scriptures, I thought it might be important for me to introduce myself. I'm Bishop Tom Gumbleton and I have been assisting on weekends at St. Philomena. But as you know, that church closed last week — very sad, I must say. Now Fr. Tim has invited me to help out here at St. Ambrose and I'm very thankful for that. I love this church and I'm sure I'll come to love the people who make up the church. So I thank Fr. Tim for inviting me.

First Sunday of Advent

Jeramiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

I might just say a word, too, about how I try to provide the reflection on the Scriptures. To me it's very, very important that every week we listen deeply to this Word of God and let it enter into our thinking, into our actions, transforming our lives. The homily that we give in church is really, as one Scripture scholar or commentator on the Scriptures suggested what we're doing after we read the Scriptures is to listen altogether out loud to what those Scriptures are saying to us. So each week I hope I can help us to listen out loud to this Word of God.

Today it's a very important message. I guess it always is, but today it's going to be something special because we're at the beginning of a new year, not a new calendar year, of course, or a fiscal year, or a school year, but a new church year. We're starting all over again to go through week after week the different seasons of this year. This season is Advent and then Christmas. Then a short time later we begin Lent and Easter, Resurrection, the Ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit. Then we again turn to the Scriptures in what we call Ordinary Time where we listen week after week to Jesus as he teaches his disciples, as he shows us how to live as a faithful servant, son or daughter of God.

We're beginning that new year today, this weekend. This year in what we call the third year in the cycle, we start with that passage in the Scripture that I think seems, in some ways, quite frightening. We reflect on the end of the world, the end of the world, as we know it. Actually, that part of the Scriptures I think comes more timely for us than it ever has been because of what we're doing to our planet if we don't begin to change. We're destroying the planet. The end of the world as we know it could come before the end of this century.

So this lesson today from Jesus really is very timely because we're not supposed to destroy the world; we're supposed to transform the world into the reign of God. That's why Jesus came — to teach us how to transform our world into the reign of God, which means where God's love controls everything, guides everything, and we all live together in peace under that reign of the love of God. Advent is a time when, first of all as we hear in this Gospel lesson, we begin to think about the return of Jesus at the end of time where he will establish this reign of God in its fullness.

In the early church, the people thought it was going to happen very quickly, within their lifetime. Gradually they became aware that it wasn't and now we're 2,000 years later. But there is an end of time, an end of history and we need to prepare for it as our Gospel lesson tells us. How do we do that? We do it by trying to listen deeply every week to what Jesus teaches us so that gradually, we absorb his message. It becomes part of us so when we think about what is right or wrong, the influence of Jesus should be what is at the basis of all of our thinking. When we think about how the world needs to be changed, the teachings of Jesus should be the basis of our understanding.

Obviously we live in a world where we desperately need change. There's war, violence, killing, extreme poverty — all those things that make life difficult for very, very many people on this planet. We all, in one way or another, experience the problems that exist in our world. We must, as we begin this new year, commit ourselves to listen deeply to what Jesus teaches us so that gradually, we are transformed and we become faithful disciples of Jesus.

In that passage from St. Paul today, he alludes to what obviously is the most important teaching of Jesus. He encourages all of us as we begin this season of Advent when we look forward to the end of time, but also look forward to the celebration of the coming of Jesus on Christmas. We must heed this word of St. Paul: "May God increase more and more your love for God and for each other. May God strengthen you internally to be holy and blameless before God." We have to begin to think how we're going to live out that command of love.

There are obviously many ways in which we can do it within our family life to make sure we're more sensitive and careful in our relationships with one another, in our parish family, in our civil community. We have to overcome some of the hostility and the anger and hatred that seems to be present in so many places in the world. We have to work to try to make peace happen. We have to work to try to make violence end.

In all of these ways — reaching out in service to our brothers and sisters and loving one another, we begin to transform our world. If we do this faithfully here in this season of Advent when we celebrate Christmas and we remember when Jesus first came into the world, we'll experience great joy and we'll know how God loves us because God so loved us that he sent his Son to be one of us, to teach us, and to show us the way to transform our world and the way to bring all of us to God forever.

[Homily given Dec. 1 at St. Ambrose Church, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]